

# “B” Rated Weeds

A weed of economic importance which is regionally abundant,  
but may have limited distribution in some counties

**Spanish Heath**  
*Erica lusitanica*

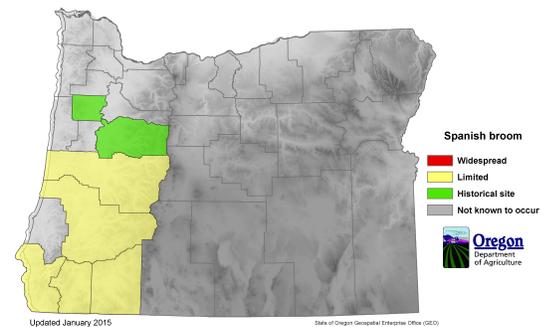
**Other common names:** Portuguese heath,  
Spanish heather

**USDA symbol:** ERLU  
**ODA rating:** B



**Introduction:** Spanish heath is a showy escaped ornament, once sold in the nursery trade. Currently the only positive economic benefit is associated with its harvest by the floral industry for use in arrangements mainly around Valentines Day. It is a prolific seeder therefore it easily escapes cultivation. This plants native range is from the Iberian Peninsula. It does not occur naturally on the American continent, or the vast majority of Asia, but has naturalized in parts of Australia and New Zealand where it is now viewed as a major environmental weed. It is problematic for right of way managers in Northern California.

**Distribution:** The weed has only been found at seven localized sites in Curry County Oregon. Infestations in Oregon can be traced back to the 1970's where it was found at a Rare Plant Nursery (now closed) north of Langlois near the Curry/Coos County line. Escaped populations have spread from there approximately 4 miles south and 2 miles north, also west, and east. A separate, small infestation has been confirmed near Nesika Beach, north of Gold Beach and in Alsea, Benton County.



**Description:** Spanish heath is a woody, upright, perennial evergreen shrub, (tree heather) growing up to 10 feet tall (3 m). Leaves are light green, needle like, 3-7 mm long and arranged around the stem in groups (whorls) of three to four. Blooms are a showy mass of small, white to pink, bell (tubular) shaped flowers. Plants begin flowering in December continuing until April. Large plants produce millions of easily transported seeds. These seeds are dispersed by wind, water, animal or human transported.

**Impacts:** Spanish heath is a weedy ornamental species of Erica known from only a few sites in Curry and Coos counties in Oregon. First established in Oregon in the 1970's, at a rare plant nursery near Langlois, it slowly spread for decades until recently, with it's population now increasing exponentially. Growing up to 10' tall, this species produces up to 9 million seeds per plant and is capable of forming dense stands in forest lands, wild areas, pastureland and on right-of-ways and will be a troublesome weed to control, should it be allowed to spread. Spanish heath has infested large areas in Northern California (Humboldt, Del Norte Counties) and is demonstrating a capacity to infest similar habitat in Oregon and Washington. It is well adapted to moist, acidic soils and could infest a wide range of shrub and forest habitats. In California, it is commonly found growing in close association with gorse, Scotch, French broom, and blackberry, especially along utility right of ways, riparian areas, and roadsides

**Biological controls:** None identified.

